

105. *Psaltriparus plumbeus*. LEAD-COLORED BUSH-TIT.— Abundant about Silver City during fall, winter, and spring.

106. *Regulus calendula*. RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET.— Abundant migrant and common winter visitant throughout the country.

107. *Polioptila cærulea obscura*. WESTERN GNATCATCHER.— Casual on Coleman's Ranch in April and May.

108. *Myadestes townsendii*. TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE.— Rather rare in the Pinos Altos country.

109. *Hylocichla guttata auduboni*. AUDUBON'S HERMIT THRUSH.— Arriving from the south about May 6.

110. *Merula migratoria propinqua*. WESTERN ROBIN.— Common as a migrant during March and April. The Western Robin breeds abundantly in the mountains north of Pinos Altos.

111. *Sialia mexicana bairdi*. CHESTNUT-BACKED BLUEBIRD.— Very common migrant and winter resident, October 1 to April 10.

112. *Sialia arctica*. MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD.— Common resident.

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## CONCERNING THE THICK-BILLED PARROT.

BY W. H. BERGTOLD.

THE writer spent several weeks in the fall of 1903 and 1904 in northern Mexico, camped in the Sierra Madra Mountains. The first visit was to the region west of Cases Grandes, wherein are located various Mormon colonies, beginning at Colonia Dublan in the east, and ending at Chuichupa in the west, all on the Gulf side of the Sierra Madra watershed. It was in this region that Mr. Wilmot W. Brown discovered and collected the Thick-billed Parrot's (*Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha*) eggs mentioned by Mr. Thayer in his notes on pages 223 and 224 of 'The Auk' of April, 1906.

This bird is increasingly common from Chuichupa southward, and was especially an everyday sight during the trip, in 1904, to the mountains west of Parral. And, being so common, it was a matter of considerable surprise to notice that Mr. Thayer speaks of his specimens as "among the first, if not the first eggs of this bird

that have been found." Had the literature bearing on this bird and its eggs been accessible to the present writer on his return from his first trip in 1903, he doubtless would have learned of the rarity of these eggs, and would have been at greater pains on the second trip to get full data concerning eggs, nesting, etc. If the statement relative to the rarity of these eggs be correct, the writer's regret is the more keen, for the mountains west of Parral are alive with these parrots, and he is sure he could easily have arranged for the collection of numerous eggs and parent birds. This regret is tempered only by the pleasure afforded by the abundant opportunity the writer had to study these parrots.

In the higher mountains west of Parral, a region varying in altitude from 4000 to 10,000 feet, the Thick-billed Parrot is far more common than northward in the country west of Cases Grandes; in fact it is the characteristic bird of these high places, as much so as is the Magpie part of the local color of our Western Plains.

It was a great surprise to see how different is a wild parrot from a tame one; one must need get an idea from the latter that a parrot is a slow, lumbering climber, able to use its wings perhaps, yet little given to prolonged and vigorous flight. On the contrary, this Thick-billed Parrot flew across deep barrancas, from mountain to mountain, as swift and strong on wing as a duck, going often in large flocks, which were noticeably divided in pairs, each couple flying one above another as closely as beating wings allowed. Its loud squawk resounded overhead, across the barrancas, and in the pines all day long, from dawn till dusk; and many and many a time a flock could be heard long before it was in sight. The birds were not at all shy, as one could walk up under a tree and watch a pair climbing in it without disturbing them in the least. Here they seemed natural, at least to one whose previous knowledge of a parrot came via the cage bird, for they climbed about precisely as does the domesticated species, using bill and feet in the familiar way; on the wing the birds seemed anything but parrots. In whatever section we saw them, these parrots were most abundant in the pines. They frequented the tops of dead pines, and were, a good part of the time, going in and out of abandoned woodpecker nests, nests which we took to be those of the Imperial Woodpecker (*Campophilus imperialis*), for this splendid woodpecker is relatively com-

mon in the same neighborhood, and is the only woodpecker which excavates such a large hole. After watching the parrots a few days we were convinced that there must be young in every hole, judging by the seeming anxiety of the birds when about these holes, and their frequent visits to them. Having no climbers, we had to chop down the first nesting tree we found; it stood near our camp, at an altitude of about 9500 feet (aneroid reading of 21.95 inches); it took nearly all day to chop and burn through the trunk, as this standing dead timber becomes exceedingly hard on drying. When this tall tree fell its upper part broke into several pieces, and we were greatly disappointed to find that the fall had killed the two young birds which we found at the bottom of one of the old woodpecker nests. These young birds were only partly fledged, in fact quite immature for so late a date (Oct. 5); this might indicate that the eggs are laid late, unless the period of incubation be long, or the development of the young be unusually slow. The last flock seen in the fall of 1903 was noted about ten miles east of Chuichupa on the morning of November 15; it was a cold day, and ice had formed on the near by creek the preceding night, all going to show that this parrot can endure considerable cold. The writer collected some skins of this species, and could have collected many more had it seemed desirable. The local Mexican name for this bird is *Guacamayo*, *i. e.*, the Spanish for parrot, and the Mexicans thereabout do not mention any other variety as coming to their notice. These birds are handsome, big creatures, and were a source of endless interest and amusement to us all.

We were mistaken in assuming that every tree with woodpecker holes visited by the parrots contained young; we located another promising tree which had several holes to which a pair of parrots made frequents visits. While cutting down this tree the pair of parrots became very much excited, and betrayed every mark of anxious parents. After a half day's work this tree was safely felled, but we found absolutely nothing in any of the old holes.

The various places mentioned in Mr. Thayer's notes are amongst the Morman colonies spoken of above; they are only about 100 miles southwest of El Paso, Cases Grandes, on the Sierra Madra & Pacific Railroad, being the railway point for these colonies. At Cases Grandes an outfit can be gathered, and, too, it is a suitable

place to use as a base of supplies. The adjacent territory wherein are found the parrots is well up on the eastern slope of the Sierra Madras, about 40 miles from Cases Grandes, and varies in altitude from 7000 to 9000 feet; is rough, cut up by a good many deep ravines (but not true barrancas), and in these high levels the surface is sparsely covered by a growth of fine tall pines. It is a charming country to camp in, is easily travelled by horses, and guides and camp help can be secured amongst the Mormons, who are not adverse to earning good American gold. In addition, this country presents, it seems to the writer, a most interesting field and opportunity for an enthusiastic ornithologist; it impresses the writer that this region might give rich returns in migration data in the fall, and would surely supply the collector and observer additional rewards in the shape of local and southern Mexican species. The nights are cool after the middle of September, even at this low latitude; the days warm, but not hot, and withal the combination is a most unusual one. Our party in 1903 had no tent, everyone sleeping out under the trees. There was plenty of natural feed for the saddle horses and pack animals, though water was somewhat scarce, and there was cold enough most of the time to take the edge off the vigor of the rattlesnakes, fleas, and tarantulas, thus obviating these annoyances, which have to be reckoned with in the earlier months, especially further south.

Unless the writer's experience was exceptional, a trip of three or four weeks to the country west of Cases Grandes would be a comparatively inexpensive one. Three or four months, from September on, would give one a most enjoyable experience, valuable specimens and data, and, aside from possible rains in September, would be entirely comfortable and safe.